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When the authors first made their way into the small farm communities which they came to know best, they were plunged into a mass of observation which, without knowledge of the valuations of the community upon age, had no interpretation. Night after night, the day's work done, their new acquaintances, at least the males among them, walked out upon the roads to this house and that in search of recreation and companionship. Mention of dances, "gambles," "hooleys," sings, *ceilidhthe*, filled our ears, belying the impression of a gray monotony of rural life too easily gathered by town-bred minds. Some of these sportive events were age-old survivals of ancient custom, like the bonfires of St. John's Eve. Others were nearly as ancient celebrations of crucial events in individual and family life, such as wakes, christenings, weddings. But many others were less occasional and less specialized gatherings, and others wore a very modern dress: a turkey raffle and a dance round a gramophone.

But our interest was soon caught by distinctions of participation, rather than those of kind. The people of the village participated variously. Different groups met more or less regularly at specific houses.

For instance, the "old fellows" went out on *cuaird*, as they called their visiting to join one another. They followed a deep-set regular habit. As they phrased it, "a man would feel lonely if he didn't go out on *cuaird*." In most communities, they usually convened at a particular house. Often their gatherings bore particular names. In one North Clare community, Rynamona by name, the old men's meeting was known as the *Dáil*. Before the Free State, it had been the "parliament." The name is a jocular one, of course, but it is expressive of the participants' evaluation of themselves nonetheless.

The young men know the *Dáil* as the "old men's house." They stay away. One of the cronies of Rynamona put the

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matter most clearly when he described the old men's gathering from its members' point of view:

> It wouldn't suit [for the young men to come]. They gather in at Jack Roche's and they laugh and joke and play cards. They talk about the next gamble and the next dance, and that is all they know. It is a lot of codology [nonsense, buncombe]. It is only the old men, the men with families and a responsibility on them, they are the ones that come. And in our own way we learn a great deal. If you advance any argument, you must be prepared to defend it from all attack, and John Roche, "the public prosecutor," will ask you questions till he is sure it is right or wrong. Then some evening we have real discussions in which we settle problems. Other times we discuss farming. It wouldn't suit for the young men to come in, but, when we get old and they get married, then they will gather and talk about this and that. That is the way it always has been and that is the way it always will be. There is never any bad blood between any of the village, and one reason is because we talk things over.

This statement on the old men's gathering imparts a deeper reality to what appears to be merely a companionable pastime of the old men. The evening *cuaird* of the old men takes on an institutional flavor. It is a clique, of course, a tightly knit group of males of similar interests and similar status, giving rise to nicknames within itself which, as in the case here mentioned of the public prosecutor, express the members' position in the internal arrangement of the group. It has a definite meeting place and meeting time. It excludes those of dissimilar traits; in this instance, the young men. But it is a clique which operates within a traditional setting: "That is the way it always has been and is the way it always will be."

It is a clique, too, which performs a function for a larger group than those who make it up. In this case it is claimed for it, at least, that it prevents bad blood in the local community.

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CHAPTER X

The Old in the Community[1]

LET us examine the life of a local community in the rural "West of Ireland" and put to the test of observation the claim that the clique of evening visitors among the old men of the community plays a decisive role in its social life. Perhaps Rynamona already mentioned affords the best example. Yet any other community the authors knew well would afford as good a one. In all of them the old men met in much the same way and, in spite of different names and persons, acted in much the same way to form a similar old men's clique. By taking the example of Rynamona, we can throw the generalities of this conduct into relief.

Rynamona is a medium-sized townland in the limestone country of North Clare. It is like many another in the "good land" of rough limestone outcrops stretching back from the sea into the glaciated lakes strewn north in County Clare. To reach Rynamona is no easy task, even for horse and car. The main road north out of Corrofin to Kilfenora passes through Kilnaboy, where twelve houses, a school, a chapel, and a post office are all that remains of an antiquity preserved to the eye only in the ninth-century church and graveyard.

There, beside the graveyard, a side road leads off toward

[1] Much of the material in this chapter is taken from *The Irish Countryman* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1936), by Conrad M. Arensberg. It is used here by permission of the publishers.

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621 487 paths crisscrosses the fields in all directions from house to house and across the countryside beyond.

887 573 Old man O'Donoghue's house, the third in the village, is the "old men's house." Mrs. Ruin, a neighbor, will tell you what the old man means to the men of the village:

> The old man is getting weaker and when he is gone out of it the village won't be the same. He will be the greatest loss. It is round his fireplace the men gather. Where will they go when he dies?

But the question has not yet arisen for the men who meet there nearly every night, particularly in winter, when the evening is long and the work day its shortest. Soon after the evening meal they begin to gather. Occasionally this or that habitué may not come, but it is always the same group of men who stride across the threshold with a "God bless all here," and take their accustomed places.

888 542 O'Donoghue has the place of honor in the chair to the right of the fire. He is an old man now and no longer active beyond the house door. He lives here with his nephew, a man of fifty, and his nephew's wife. The couple have no children and must depend upon their own efforts in the working of the farm. It is a good farm and the nephew works it well, deferring to the old man in occasional matters.

888 573 521 O'Donoghue is the "judge" in this gathering. In the nightly discussions which take place around his fireplace, he has a judicial role. He is regarded as a wise man to whose opinions all must defer. Usually they know he contents himself with a word of affirmation, or now and again a slow and measured judgment upon a current topic. He initiates nothing and only occasionally adds a non-judicial bit to the conversation. Then he shows himself to have a fund of funny and apt anecdotes as good as any other man's. He rarely generalizes. When he does, his remarks deal with the "old times."

Silent as this shrewd old man is, his is the central position

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888 573 521 in the group. Comments and questions are phrased through him. He takes the preferred verbal bit and passes it on among the others. And when agreement is finally reached, it is his quiet "So it is" that settles the point for good.

573 O'Halloran sits on the hob across the hearth from him. He is the "drawer-down" in the scheme of jocular titles which includes most of the group. O'Halloran is a man of fifty but mature. He owns a farm a little better perhaps [592] than most, just beyond the village. He works it with his wife and six children, the eldest of whom is nearing twenty. As he has no parents left alive, he is the "old man" and the man of the house. But individually he is more. "He has a [484 great head on him," they say. He has had a somewhat wider experience, once having traveled as a salesman over the 446] roads of southern Ireland. Yet, in spite of the fact that he is occasionally a little skeptical and his politics are somewhat suspect to the villagers, who are today De Valera men to a man, he is emphatically one of them.

573 521 His title of "drawer-down" is an apt one. O'Halloran seeks information. He most frequently of them all brings up points of interest and questions of the day. These he addresses to O'Donoghue, who passes them on for general discussion. Like all the rest of them his illustrations are apt and his anecdotes definite and precise, but his chief role is to "draw the talk down" to common levels of interest which allow all to take part.

573 521 589 O'Loughlin usually occupies the other hob. He has no real place here. He is a bachelor, aged fifty or so, and, though he comes here, he has little to say. He is seemingly silent all the time, and he breaks his silence only to add to unanimity. For O'Loughlin is very poor and lives alone. Having no family, he can neither coor nor work his land to best advantage. And occasionally he works on the road, breaking stones with the boys of the village. Just as he has no voice here, he has no title either.

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Roche, "the public prosecutor," sits by the fire, opposite the old man O'Donoghue. He is a man of sixty or so, with a wife of the same age and an unmarried son and daughter, both in their thirties, still at home. His is a good farm and he is still active upon it. He, too, has a reputation for shrewdness, but his role here is a different one. Roche demands "why?" He makes one bring out one's best arguments, and pursues a point to its final conclusion. There his interest stops and he makes way for O'Donoghue, who sums up the agreement of the group. Roche earns his title well. He tests out the other's mettle. No one is offended at his "prosecution," for it clears the issue and brings out the right and the wrong upon which all can agree and O'Donoghue phrase judgment.

Behind them, a little further into the middle of the room away from the hearth, sits Cullinan, the "senator." Cullinan lives across the lake, where he works a middling farm with a wife and five children. Several of the sons are nearing twenty-five and Cullinan himself is well past fifty.

The "senator" is a weighty man. His part in the *cuaird* is in character. Cullinan is the one of them most fertile in cogent and fitting anecdotal illustrations. In a scheme of references, such as this, to past events and traditional precedents, Cullinan's many memories of persons and happenings, slowly and accurately phrased, give weight to the evening discussions.

Still further behind them, and often perched upon settle or table in the kitchen, are two other habitués. The elder of them is Noonan, a man of sixty, who lives in the village with a wife a little younger than himself and two boys and a girl, out of a once numerous progeny, still at home. The children are in their twenties and help him in his still active conduct of the farm.

Privately at least, the others think Noonan a bit of a fool. He is as good a farmer as any of them, it is true, and knows

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573 521 how to drive a shrewd bargain. But his role at *cuaird* is not a weighty one. Noonan is a very voluble man. He can be counted upon at all times to enliven the gathering with many opinions on all subjects. His volubility makes him more vulnerable than the rest to the public prosecutor's relentless logic, but it helps too to keep the conversation alive and active. Consequently, though he has no important title, he is a member of long standing.

573 592 The younger of the two sitting in back is John Quin. His position is a little anomalous, though he is a Rynamona man by birth and blood. Quin lives on a good farm just outside the village. He married-in there, taking over the [582] place of a dead husband. But, true to the country custom, it was not the widow he married. She brought in a sister, who, in turn, married Quin. But both women are still living in the house. The elder sister has become the "old woman" and is treated more like a parent than a contemporary. It is Quin and his wife, the younger sister, who work the farm and who regard it as their own. Their claim is a perfect one, were it not for one misfortune: they are childless at fifty.

573 561 Quin is thus neither fully a young man nor fully an old one, as the countryside reckons age status. His place in the evening gathering reflects this intermediate state. In the two years in which the authors had the old men's house at Rynamona under observation, Quin was going through a transition. It was one which he could not describe himself, but which showed itself well in his behavior.

573 561 521 When we first came, Quin divided his evenings between the old men's house and card playing in several of the young men's gathering places. At one of these, to be described shortly, he was an important figure. His pronouncements were listened to with respect. He had "weight," and he conducted himself importantly and showed a serious demeanor and a little disdain for frivolous pursuits. In the

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old men's house he looked a different person. He was often 573
silent or contented himself with answering questions. 561
When he did speak, it was to "act the playboy," in the 521
country phrase. It seemed to be a periodic fluctuation with him. One evening he would be silent and the next he would be more than ready to joke, to render a song, to dance, and to break into playful banter. Sometimes his lively efforts were successful. Sometimes they were not. But the playboy role did not last long. A year later he was a constant visitor, and he had given up all other visits. He had moved in. O'Donoghue, the "judge," passed judgment one evening which affirmed his new place. "He's a bit of a playboy," he said, "but there's a good head on him."

These seven men make up the old men's *cuaird*. As the 573
evidence of their behavior shows, they are a closely knit 887
clique with a code of conduct and valuation of their own, one strong enough to enforce a specific personality on each of the members in accord with his role in the group.

To appraise the *raison d'être* of such a group in Rynamona, we must examine it in relation to the rest of the community. These seven are not the only old men in the community. Roche, the prosecutor, had an elder brother with a good farm across the lake on the line between Rynamona and the next townland, Carhunamadra. But the elder Roche is seventy-five and no longer stirs out the door. He is too feeble to come to the *cuaird* house, and his faculties are failing. His sons, still young men, work the farm.

But there is another as well, a more active old man. Moroney is perhaps the strongest farmer in Rynamona. His house in the village is the best also, and he has the best-stocked farm. Moroney and his wife, at sixty, have a son [592]
and daughter nearing thirty still at home. The four work energetically and the household is prosperous. Each year Moroney stands for them in the "station," and the family's

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573 887 dues to the church are greater than any other's in Rynamona. Such prosperity draws him a bit apart from the villagers, and occasionally in political discussions he will identify himself with the Cosgrave party, as a man with a "stake in the country."

All this draws Moroney away from his fellows. Some say there was an incident long ago when Moroney was young, but most have forgotten it. Nevertheless, there is a breach between Moroney and the rest of the older men of the village. He never attends at the old men's house and, when he goes on *cuaird*, it is usually to the house of Oscair, whom we shall describe presently.

Furthermore, just as not all the old men of Rynamona came to O'Donoghue's, so are their households unrepresented there. Unlike the cases of the elder Roche and Moroney, it is because in these other cases the men of the house are not eligible in age.

573 Two houses in the village send no man to the *cuaird* house. One of these is very poor and is a case of the "incomplete farm family" already discussed in a prior section. The only man there is a lad of twenty-five or so, who lives alone with his mother. Another of these is the case of O'Brien, a man of forty, married and with a family of children, the eldest of whom, a boy, is fifteen. O'Brien is a man of uncertain temper, given to gusts of anger. He is a moody man who doesn't do much or go out much. When he does, it is to the young men's gambles. Like John Quin, already described, he is in a transitional state, but he does nothing to hasten his advance.

Among the households beyond the village, one, that of Mackey, is likewise in transition. But with Mackey the process is hardly begun. His parents are dead, but he has only recently married and sent off a brother to the towns. He still visits with the young men.

The same holds for another family of Roches. The man

[i.e., farms worked by spinsters, bachelors, widows and widowers - Analyst]

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of the house is only a few years married. His brother is as yet unprovided for and still lives with him. Both frequent young men's meetings. 573

The old men's house includes all the adult farm fathers of complete families whose children have just succeeded or are nearly ready to succeed them, with two exceptions. It brings in, too, two others, O'Loughlin, the silent old bachelor, and John Quin, whose status among the old age group is still provisional. The interviews already quoted have given an insight into the function this meeting performs for the community. The behavior of the group points again to the same function. This is the seat of judgment in the community. It is the clearing house of information and the court of opinion in which the decisions of the community are reached and the traditional knowledge of the peasantry applied and disseminated. From these meetings the men return home to their wives and sons, and the formulations they have reached spread thus through the community of individuals who share life in Rynamona. 573 621 208 887

Let us examine the type of topic that comes up in the old men's meetings. If we want to assure ourselves that the meeting has the influence its members ascribe to it, a glance at the conversation that takes place there should bear them out.

The old men's meeting is an informal gathering. It arises in response to the community's interests and its immemorial custom. Naturally, different personalities and personal idiosyncrasies make the gathering slightly different in each rural community. Occasionally it may be absent altogether for various causes, such as the dying-off of a central member of the group. Often there is a sort of interregnum between one generation of old men and the next. This was the case in one Clare community studied by the authors. There the old men had lost the central figure of their group and, diminished in number, spent most of their time in enfeebled 573 887

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loneliness at home. Two new cliques of slightly younger "old men" were competing for central position in the community.

But despite such variation from community to community, the old men's *cuairds* act very similarly. The topics brought up and debated upon are much the same from year to year and place to place. First in importance, however, are those concerning agriculture. Times of sowing, reaping, harvesting are debated; the merits of various seeds are disputed; shop and fair prices are compared; and the community's trade often affected thus. The "old men" are conservative farmers, as are most peasants, and an innovation must be thoroughly tested before it wins, here in the evening *cuaird*, the approval of the community. Traditional methods of farming receive their strongest support here in the web of legend, proverb, and reference to the past that the speakers weave around them.

Much of the community's relation to the outer world is debated here and determined by the old men's agreement. In late years, this has come to be called "politics." It is here that petitions for roads, for relief work in winter, for extension of agricultural prize schemes, and all the "political" business of the county council and its committees originates on the side of the local community. It is here too that the community reaches its unanimity in party voting. In Rynamona, for example, it was felt that it was in the interest of all that there should be no dissension on the score of politics. The old men's *cuaird* debated the matter and agreed upon support of Fianna Fail, the De Valera party, an allegiance it held for the years 1927 to the time of the authors' visits. Even O'Halloran, whose private views leaned in another direction, begged the authors that no word of his political heterodoxy be allowed to reach the ears of his neighbors. "I wouldn't want them to think I wasn't with them," he said.

Here it is too that the community makes its appraisal of its own members and those with whom it is in contact. And that appraisal tells quite heavily in the behavior the community will adopt toward the person or condition appraised. Even the priest finds each of his acts and even his sermons discussed and debated in the evening *cuaird*, and he "gets a name" according to the decision reached. In Rynamona an incident occurred which shows the type of slow appraisal the community makes and the speed with which, once its judgment is formed, it puts its decision into action. Not far away in the same general region, a gentlewoman moved back after years of absence to a small manor house which the family had had for many years. She was unknown to the farmers and, despite her friendly interest in them, seemed to be unable to establish contact with them. This distressed her, the more that her kindness seemed ineffectual in putting an end to the inevitable petty pilfering which she knew she must expect. One day, about a year later, her horse bolted on the country road. An expert horsewoman, she soon brought him into control. Thereafter her luck with the country people changed. Her exploit had made the rounds of the local community and had won approval for her. The old men agreed she was a grand lady and had a great hand with horses. And the petty pilfering sank to manageable proportions.

The community regulates its internal affairs through the *cuaird* as well. It is here public opinion is formulated. There is nothing formal about the decisions made upon the incidents arising from day to day. The local community has no implement with which to enforce its will. But it has the power of gossip and in action the power which in the critical days of the land agitation won itself an international name: the boycott.

In a later section the sanctions the local community exercises will be discussed. It is sufficient here to point out

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this role of the *cuaird*. An example from another community than Rynamona will throw the type of action it can take into relief.

An "incomplete family" affords the example. It was made up of an old woman and her thirty-year-old son. Theirs was a poor farm, and ordinarily they would have been an object of commiseration. But they were not. In fact, they were a constant annoyance. The son was generally regarded as bad and lazy. He neglected his farm and exhibited an obstinate disregard of village opinion in which his mother abetted him. The result was, naturally, that their house was shunned and he went nowhere to *cuaird*.

But no crisis arose till the episode of the pig. One autumn the son brought home a large Irish white sow. The sow was more nimble than most of her kind, and neither the mother nor the son took any pains to keep her at home. She wandered through the village at will and soon devastated many a cabbage patch. The village took alarm, and the more so that the sow might well prove dangerous to young children. There were angry words among the women, and the men for once backed them up. In the *cuaird* it was hinted that the sow might be found dead one morning. But before such an event could take place, the son took warning and sold the pig. "Public pressure," if you will, forced his decision and resolved the conflict, but it left him as low as ever in the village's esteem.

And lastly, the *cuaird* is the seat of traditional lore and entertainment. Its members are the repositories of folklore and legend. And the official belief of the countryside finds its expression and its reaffirmation in the discussion of events and the recounting of histories and incidents. In communities still at least partly Irish-speaking, such as Luogh, most of its members are *seanachaidhthe*, storytellers in the traditional vein. And it is among them that traditional repertories of a saga, folk tale, song, and legend still get an

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audience. The point of importance here is that it is among the old people that folk myth and folk belief are preserved and expressed for the community.

If we are to examine in full rural behavior based upon age and its connection with the old adult clique whose function in the community we are assessing, we must offer some contrast with the behavior of other age groups.

We have already mentioned that the old men's house in Rynamona was not the only seat of visiting after the day's work, and that the entertainment provided there was merely one instance of many gatherings taking place almost nightly, at least through the winter, in rural communities. In the statements given by older men about the meeting of the young men we have seen something of the manner in which other pursuits than those of the men's house are regarded.

Indeed in all the communities which came under the authors' notice the young men were as ardent evening visitors as were the older men. In Rynamona they were no less so.

There they gathered in most often at the house of Roche, the "prosecutor." They did this from long habit, as did their elders. But they had no larger justification for their doing so. They went because "you never feel the time passing when you're in with the boys." But there were marked differences in their meeting. There was no central clique so closely integrated as that in O'Donoghue's house. There were pairs of lads, brothers, friends, and groups of three and four and five who habitually played cards or walked the roads together.

A greater difference lay in their complete lack of concern with the affairs of the community. One could get them to talk only about their own plans or the trials of their own kind and age. There was no debate, no reaching of decisions, no appeal to tradition. The skills upon which those taking part in the meetings prided themselves and for which

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571 517 tral clique, is not without wider interest. The young men are more numerous, and they group themselves together as much as do the old. But it is upon a different basis. It is a synthesis in a looser, more widely inclusive, gathering which [573] unites smaller cliques of brothers, friends, and boon companions. The gamble is only one of many entertainments 571 they provide themselves. Equally frequently they hold a 517 dance. The country dance is undergoing change in rural 535 Ireland today, but it is still much as it was in the last century, although it may not enliven the country districts as often as it did. Irish square dances, jigs, and flings, most of them variations of sixteenth-century European dance forms, are most common, although some Gaelic-speaking districts preserve an older tradition.

621 The country dance belongs to the young people. It differs from the gamble, from the standpoint of participants, in 536 that it unites both sexes. In most communities it is an 517 affair in which the whole community takes part, the old people as onlookers, the young and the still spry among the older ones as performers. In late years the more formal "all night" dance, an organized dance for which admission is charged and from which the older people are usually absent, has made its appearance. Like the gamble it draws from a wider area.

517 But there is a good deal of the spontaneous dancing which springs up wherever the young people of the community 535 gather even today. The young men and women learn the skills required and value them. There are elaborate codes of etiquette round them and a wealth of proverbs and jocular superstitions. But here again, unlike the behavior followed in the old men's house, these conducts have little larger purpose than uniting the scattered cliques of young people. They are recreations. They are ends in themselves. They are good times that pass the time.

517 The gamble and the dance do not, of course, exhaust the 571 list. The young people have other activities, games, sports,

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182 554 621 888 through rural life under normal circumstances is not toward a greater and greater prominence in the activities of the young men's group. Rather, there comes a time when one must break away altogether. One faces perforce a new orientation of sentiment and a new kind of behavior. Growing old brings many more changes than the physiological.

888 573 885 554 The case of the newcomer, John Quin, already described, shows the necessary changes. In Rynamona it is brought out very clearly in the clique to which he first belonged and to which we have referred at various times, calling it once the "intermediate."

[551] The clique we name so met at the house of one Joseph McMahon, more commonly known as Oscair (the Hercules of Irish saga) for his physical strength. Oscair was a rural carpenter with only a very small plot of garden and his house. But he was a good singer, a jokester, and a repository of folk tale, though he was not much past forty. He lived just at the edge of the slope leading from Kilnaboy Commons down to Rynamona. The townland was what would be called in urban sociology an "interstitial area." It was higher, rougher, and more craggy than Rynamona and Kilnaboy, lying between them. Its inhabitants were descendants of people evicted from round about who had squatted there. Most of them were "died out and left," and the place was always poor. It acted as a sort of outlying fringe of Rynamona.

The men who collected round Oscair's fire were aged thirty-five to sixty. Just as their ages were intermediate between fully old and fully young, so was their habit here. They very seldom played cards. Talk was the order of the day, enlivened by Oscair's humor and ballads. A few of them spoke of the affairs of the village with some weight. The rest did not. Those who came were as follows:

a. Young Mackey, from the village, the man recently married, still too young for the old men's house.

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b. Moroney, the sixty-year-old, "strongest" (richest) farmer of the village. One of the few who spoke with weight.
c. Young Roche, son of the very old man, still unmarried but entirely in charge of the farm he would soon inherit.
d. O'Sullivan, a herdsman, from near-by, who was a stranger in the community but had won himself a place, despite his being a landless man of sixty-five, by acting as the local veterinarian. He spoke, too, with weight.
e. John Quin, already described, who spoke here with weight.
f. Two forty-year-old Pilkington brothers, unmarried, from the Commons, very small farmers, most often silent.
g. Oscair himself, whose role was to entertain.

Of these men it can be seen that only Mackey, Moroney, and John Quin could make the transition to full farm-owning, farm-father status of old men. Mackey had years to pass before he could so do. His eldest child was very young and he himself not long in possession of his farm. John Quin, in a somewhat anomalous position, could and did move onward. In doing so, as we described, he felt it necessary to break away completely from this group. This he did, with the result that the group, itself never stable, fell to pieces. Moroney, as we remember, had a disagreement with the villagers and would not attend the old men's gatherings.

What was it then that brought these men together? The authors could get no answer from the men themselves, other than their amusement with Oscair and, in Moroney's case, a guardedly phrased dislike of the villagers. Yet, through observation and interview in the community, it became clear that they were all passing through a similar transition. Oscair's visitors were not a stable clique, nor too faithful in attendance. Both young Roche and young Mackey were still going occasionally to the young men's meeting at the other Roche's house, but both felt too great responsibilities for gambling and cards. John Quin gambled heartily enough

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but was more and more impatient with the "playboys" of young fellows. Old Moroney was gruff and lonely. The others were neighbors of Oscair's and, being poor or landless men, felt awkward going elsewhere. O'Sullivan could visit as he pleased, for, as the local "vet," his word carried weight, but, always a stranger in sentiment, he felt most at home here.

The intermediate clique was a product of similarity of interests, in contrast to the interests of other better organized groups. Its members were in some way or another a little different from the ordinary old or young of Rynamona. Some of them were remote topographically, but not all. Some were without full community status, but not all, and some of a transitional age.

Oscair's house was thus a sort of catchall for those whose position in Rynamona was not clearly defined. It was intermediate between the clearly defined groups, and for the small farmers, such as Mackey, Roche, and Quin, was a halfway stage in their advance from the status of young men to that of old.

The progression of which this is the halfway stage is an upward one, metaphorically speaking. It leads no longer to a greater role as "playboy" but toward full family and community status. It leads to a new behavior and new personal desires, more highly valued. One's discarded status and one's discarded behavior fall away into lesser esteem. In terms of this progression we can understand the attitude of the old men on the behavior of the young ones. It is a transitory, impermanent, unimportant thing. It is a "codology." "When they grow older," one old man said, "and become married, they will meet just as we do."

What shows itself in Oscair's clique is a transitional state. For a moment were gathered here those who could move upward, like John Quin. Gradually, they could attain full status. Oscair's hearth for them was a roadside resting place.

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With these intermediates were gathered the representatives of another anomalous social place. Both Oscair and O'Sullivan, the "vet," were important figures in the community. Their occupations and their skills won them respect and admiration over the countryside. O'Sullivan, the older man, was free to come and go wherever he might wish. But both were "landless" men. They could never attain full peasant status. In the identifications of Irish familism, they were condemned to celibacy. Neither could feel comfortable in the old men's *cuaird*. There was no place for them except, as Oscair's behavior showed, as playboys and entertainers. So they too must occupy an interstice in the structural alignments of rural social life.

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sional and less specialized gatherings; and others again wore a very modern dress: a turkey raffle and a dance round a gramophone.

But our interest was soon caught by distinctions of participation, rather than those of kind. The personalities of the 'village' participated variously, different groups met more or less regularly at specific houses.

For instance, the 'old fellows' went out on *cuaird*, as they called their visiting, to join one another. They followed a deep-set regular habit. As they phrased it "a man would feel lonely if he didn't go out on *cuaird*".

In most communities they usually convened at a particular house. Often their gatherings bore particular names. In one North Clare community, Rynamona by name, the old men's meeting was known as the 'Dáil'. Before the Free State, it had been the 'parliament'. The name is a jocular one, of course, but as we shall see, it is expressive of the participants' evaluation of themselves, none the less.

The young men know the 'Dáil' as the 'old men's house'; they stay away. One of the cronies of Rynamona put the matter most clearly, when he described the old men's gathering from its members' point of view:

"It wouldn't suit [for the young men to come]," he said. "They gather in at Jack Roche's and they laugh and joke and play cards; they talk about the

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561 next gamble and the next dance, and that is all they
577 know. It is a lot of codology [he means, nonsense,
● 573 buncombe]. It is only the old men, the men with families and a responsibility on them, they are the ones that come. And in our own way we learn a great deal. If you advance any argument you must be prepared to defend it from all attack, and John Roche, 'the public prosecutor', will ask you questions till he is sure it is right or wrong. Then some evening we have real discussions in which we settle problems. Other times we discuss farming. It wouldn't suit for the young men to come in, but when we get old and they get married, then they will gather just as we do and talk about this and that. That is the way it always has been and that is the way it always will be. There is never any bad blood between any of the village, and one reason is because we talk things over."

The statement, then, imparts a deeper reality to what appears at first sight to be merely a companionable pastime of the older men. This meeting of theirs is a clique, a tightly knit group of males of similar status and interests. It is strong enough and binding enough to bestow nicknames upon its members as in the case of the 'public prosecutor'. But it is a clique, too, which operates within a traditional setting. It has a function to perform for others than the cronies who make it up. The speaker claims for it at least that it prevented bad blood in the village.

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In such a clique, the student of social behaviour can see fairly closely the interplay of social dispositions and individual character. Concrete cases have a way of disposing of controversies by transporting the issue to a new plane. In the study of such a case as this, as we shall see, the old question whether the individual affects the society or the society moulds the individual—a long-standing scholastic debate among sociologists—can be pushed into well-merited oblivion. For the answer is that both interpretations are correct; and that neither is at all penetrating. The issue is free to move to a new plane: the relations between behaviours and the patterning of sentiment and conduct.

In the old men's clique of Rynamona we have our concrete instance. Similar old men's gatherings from any other of the rural communities my colleagues and I knew would serve as well. They are remarkably similar even to duplicating nicknames. For as our informant explains: "That is the way it always was and that is the way it always will be". A social system endures in past and future and exists in space, its changes are changes of this spatial and temporal world, its constancies are likewise bound to earth and time.

Rynamona, then, shall be our present instant in time and space. Rynamona is a medium-sized townland in the limestone country of North Clare. It is like many another of the 'good land'

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have met in Luogh. None has ten cows, and only one has a single beast. Except for the eight houses huddled in the village, fields and meadows stretch away from the haggard wall. In the case of the villagers, the fields are scattered about and behind the haggards in irregular patterns. Besides these home fields, most of Rynamona has two or three acres in additions carved out for them by the Land Commission on an estate about two miles off.

Rynamona is a closely knit community. Reduplicated bonds of kinship unite all the households. "We are all related one way or another", they say. 'Cooring' is the usual form of co-operation. The village holds itself responsible amid grumbles for maintaining the borheen which leads out to the outside world of the towns. Nowadays, the County Council pays the sons who break stones and lay them in the winter months, but the village still assigns a bit of the road to each householder. Small matter if the borheen is bad, for a well-trod maze of paths criss-crosses the fields in all directions.

Old man O'Donoghue's house, the third in the village, is the 'old men's house'. Mrs. Ruin, a neighbour, will tell you what the old man means to the men of the village. "The old man is getting weaker and when he is gone out of it the village won't be the same. He will be the greatest loss. It is round his fireplace the men gather. Where will they go when he dies?"

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573 But the question has not yet arisen for the men who meet there nearly every night, particularly in winter, when the evening is long and the day's work shortest. Soon after supper they begin to gather. Perhaps this or that *habitué* may not come, but it is always the same group of men who stride across the threshold with a "God bless all here" and take their accustomed places.

O'Donoghue has the place of honour. He sits in the chair to the right of the fire. He is an old man now and no longer very active beyond the house door. He lives here with his nephew, a man of fifty, and his wife. The nephew and nephew's wife have no children, but must depend upon their own efforts in the working of the farm. It is a good farm; the nephew works it well, deferring to the old man's judgment in most matters.

O'Donoghue is the 'judge' in this gathering. In the nightly discussions which take place round his hearth he has a judicial role. He is regarded as a wise man. All must defer to his opinions. Usually he contents himself with a word of affirmation, or now and again, a slow, measured judgment upon a current topic. He initiates nothing. Only occasionally does he add a non-judicial bit to the conversation. Then he shows himself to have a fund of funny and apt anecdote as good as any other man's. He rarely generalizes; when he does, his theme is the 'old times'.

Silent as this shrewd old man is, his is the

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central position in the group. Comments and questions are phrased through him. He takes the proffered verbal bit and passes it on among the others. And, when agreement is finally reached, it is his quiet "so it is" that settles the point for good. 573

O'Halloran sits on the hob across the hearth from him. He is the 'drawer down' in the scheme of jocular titles which includes most of the group. O'Halloran is a mature man of fifty or more. He owns a farm a little better perhaps than most, just beyond the village. He works it with his wife and six children, the eldest of whom is nearly thirty. As he has no parents left alive, O'Halloran is the 'old man' and the 'man of the house'. But, individually, he is more. "He has a great head on him", they say. He has had a somewhat wider experience; once he travelled over the roads of southern Ireland as a salesman. Yet, though he is a little sceptical occasionally, and his politics are somewhat suspect to the villagers, who are de Valera men today, almost to a man, he is emphatically one of them.

His title of 'drawer down' is an apt one. O'Halloran seeks information. Most frequently it is he who brings up points of interest and questions of the day. These he addresses to O'Donoghue, who passes them on for general discussion. Like all the rest of them, he is most at home in finding apt illustrations in definite, precisely told anecdotes. But his chief role is to 'draw the talk down' to common levels of interest.

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● 573 O'Loughlin usually occupies the other hob. He has no real place here. He is a bachelor, aged fifty or more, and though he comes here, he has little to say. He is silent nearly all the time. When he breaks silence it is only to add to unanimity. For O'Loughlin, the bachelor, lives alone, is very poor, and having no family, can neither 'coor' nor work his land to best advantage. Occasionally he works with the 'boys' at stone-breaking on the roads. Just as he has no voice here, he has no title either.

Roche, the 'public prosecutor', sits in the chair before the hearth opposite the old man O'Donoghue. He is a man of sixty. He has a wife and an unmarried son and daughter, both in their thirties, still at home. His is a good farm, and he is still active upon it. Roche also has a reputation for shrewdness, but his role here is a different one. Roche demands 'why', he forces one to parade one's best arguments, he pursues a point relentlessly to its final conclusion. There his interest stops, and he makes way for O'Donoghue, who sums up the agreement of the group.

Roche earns his title well; he tests one's mettle. No one takes offence at his 'prosecution'. It clears the issue and brings out the right and the wrong upon which all can agree and O'Donoghue phrase judgment.

Behind these two, a little further into the middle of the room, sits Cullinan, the 'senator'. Cullinan

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lives across the lake. He works a middling farm with his wife and five children. Several of the sons are nearing twenty-five, and Cullinan himself is well past fifty. 573

The 'senator' is a 'weighty' man. His part here is in character. Cullinan is the one of them most fertile in cogent and fitting anecdotal illustration. In a scheme, such as this, of reference to past event and traditional precedent, Cullinan's memory of persons and happenings, slowly and accurately, even pompously phrased, gives 'weight' to the evening's discussions.

Still further behind them, and often perched upon settle or table in this kitchen, are two other *habitués*. The elder of them is Ruin, a man of sixty, who lives in the village with a wife considerably younger than himself, and two boys and a girl, out of a once more numerous progeny, still at home. The children are in their twenties, and help him in his still active conduct of the farm.

Privately, at least, the others think Ruin 'a bit of a fool'. He is as good a farmer as any of them, it is true, and knows how to drive a shrewd bargain. But his role at *cuaird* is not a weighty one. Ruin is a very voluble man; he can be counted upon at all times to enliven the gathering with a deal of opinion upon all subjects. His volubility makes him more vulnerable than the rest to the 'public prosecutor's' relentless logic. Nevertheless, it helps to keep the conversation alive and active. Conse-

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573 quently, though he has no important title, Ruin is a member of long standing.

The younger of the two men sitting in back, of which Ruin is one, is John Quinn. His position is a little anomalous, though he is a Rynamona man by birth and blood. Quinn works a good farm just beyond the village. He married-in there, taking over the place of a dead husband. But, true to country custom, it was not the widow he married. She brought in a sister who in turn married Quinn. Both women are still living in the house. But the elder sister has become the 'old woman' and is treated more like a parent than like a contemporary. It is Quinn and his wife who work the farm and regard it as their own. Their claim would be a perfect one, were it not for one misfortune; they are childless, at fifty.

Quinn is thus neither fully a young man nor fully an old one, as the countryside reckons age status. And his place in the evening gathering reflects this indeterminate state. In the two years in which my colleagues and I had Rynamona under observation, Quinn was going through a transition. It was one which he could not describe himself, but one which showed itself well in his behaviour.

When we first came, Quinn divided his evenings between the old men's house and card-playing in several of the young men's gathering places. At one of these, he was an important figure. His pronouncements were listened to with respect. He had

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'weight'. He showed in his serious manner a little disdain for frivolous pursuits. 573

In the old men's house, however, he looked a different figure. He was often silent, or contented himself with answering questions. When he did speak, it was to 'act the playboy', in the country phrase. It seemed to be a periodic fluctuation with him. One evening he would be silent, and the next he would be more than ready to joke, to render a song, to break into playful banter. Sometimes his efforts were successful, sometimes they were not.

But Quinn's playboy role did not last long. A year later he was an *habitué* of the old men's *cuaird*; he had given up all other visits. He had moved in. O'Donoghue, 'the judge', passed judgment one evening which affirmed his new place. "He's a bit of a playboy", he said, "but he has a good head on him."

These seven men make up the old men's *cuaird*. One can see how closely knit a clique they are. They have code and values of their own, strong enough to enforce specific personalities on each of the members, in accordance with the role of each in the group.

But there is an external side to this clique as well. To appraise the *raison d'être* of such a group in Rynamona, one must know its place in the community. These seven men, for instance, are not the only old men in Rynamona. Roche the 'public prosecutor' has a brother, with a good farm, 571 573

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571 573 across the line between Rynamona and the next townland, Carhunamadra. But the elder Roche is seventy-five and no longer stirs out the door; he is too feeble. His sons, still 'young men', work the farm.

But there is also another, and more active, old fellow. Moroney is, perhaps, the 'strongest' farmer in Rynamona. His house in the village is the best in the townland, and his farm the best stocked. Moroney and his wife, at sixty, work it with the help of a son and daughter, both nearing thirty. Each year, Moroney stands for them all at the 'station' and the family's dues to the Church are greater than any other's in Rynamona. Such prosperity draws Moroney a bit apart from the villagers. Occasionally, in discussions of politics, he will identify himself with the Cosgrave party, as a man with a 'stake in the country'.

All this sets Moroney a bit apart. Some say there was an incident long ago when Moroney was young; but most have forgotten it. Nevertheless, the breach is there. Moroney never attends at the old men's house.

Furthermore, just as not all the old men of Rynamona come to O'Donoghue's, so are there also households which have no representative there. With them, however, the transition we saw in John Quinn's case has scarcely begun. Two examples will show you the case. O'Brien is a man of forty. He is married, his parents are dead, his

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children none older than fifteen. He is eligible in age and status, perhaps, but he does nothing to hasten the transition from young man to old. For O'Brien is a man of moody temper, given to gusts of anger. He goes out very little at all; when he does it is to the young men's gambles.

With Mackey, the process is hardly begun. Mackey's parents are dead, and the farm is his. But Mackey is only very recently married, and he sent off a brother to the towns only a year or so ago. He, too, still visits with the young men.

Therefore, with these easily accounted-for exceptions, the old men's house includes all the farm-fathers of complete families. It is made up of those who are married and in the words already quoted 'have a responsibility on them'. Informal as it is, it nevertheless unites these men of full status within the community and unites them, too, in such a way as to crystallize and canalize the influence their status gives them.

For this clique is built round discussion and decision, as its nicknames show us, because discussion and decision are its role for the community at large. In the persons of these old men, in their deliberation, the integration of the community is accomplished.

The old man's superior status in the family and in the community cannot be separated from his half of a mutuality which unites him to his subordinates, and gives him, as it were, his *noblesse*

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571 *oblige*. In the same way, the old men's clique
573 operates.

For here in the old men's house, the countryman's way of life exerts its strongest sway upon him. It is the 'parliament' of his fellows. The topics brought up and debated upon are much the same from year to year and place to place. Agriculture, perhaps, comes first. Times of sowing, reaping and harvesting are debated. Prices are compared, innovations tested. Traditional methods receive their strongest support here, in the web of legend, proverb and reference to the past the speakers throw round them.

573 Much of the community's relation to the outer
621 world takes its form here, determined in the old
66 men's argument and agreement. In late years this has come to be called 'politics'. Petitions for relief road work, for expansion of agricultural prize schemes, most, in fact, of the business of the County Council and its committees originates on the side of local community in the discussions of the old men's *cuaird*. It is here, too, that the community reaches unanimity in party voting. In Rynamona, for instance, it is felt that the interest of all demands that there should be no dissension on the score of politics. Consequently, even O'Halloran, the 'drawer down', whose private views leaned in a different direction from those of the villagers, begged that no word of his heterodoxy be allowed to reach the ears of Rynamona. "I wouldn't want

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them to think I wasn't with them", he put it. No wonder, then, that the political allegiances of whole countrysides are constant factors in Irish politics.

The community reaches agreement upon its internal affairs, too, through the old men's discussions. It is in just this type of activity that one can at last put one's finger upon that nebulous force among men: public opinion. That force is not implemented; it is merely the power of gossip and censure; only in critical days, as in the time of land agitation, can it rise to action, as a last resort, and win itself an international name: the boycott. But it is none the less powerful.

But, in rural Ireland, the group through which this power flows serves another function which cannot be disassociated from its role as the seat of public opinion. The members of the old men's *cuaird* are the living repositories of tradition. In communities, such as Luogh, where the Irish language lingers on, many of them are *seanachaidhthe* or story-tellers. Among them the ancient repertories of legend, saga and folk-tale still find an audience. That the exponents of fairy-lore have always been, and are still, old men and old women, is no social accident. For the pattern of local life retains its continuity and preserves what it can of its conformity with the past through them.

But what of the young men, those who have not attained full status? They do not attend at the old men's house; they take no part in the deliberations

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884 there. From their own point of vantage, they scorn
573 their elders, as much as their subordinate position allows. And they, too, walk out on *cuaird* upon the roads night after night and gather-in at this house and that.

In Rynamona, they were as ardent evening visitors as the older men. But their habit showed a great difference. There was no single central clique so closely knit as that of the old men's house. They had no larger justification, as the old men had, for their meetings. They went because, frankly, "you never feel the time passing when you're in with the boys". They formed pairs of lads, brothers, friends, and groups of three and four and five who habitually played cards or walked the roads together. A still greater difference marked these groups. One rarely heard them talk of the affairs of the community. There was no debate, no reaching of decisions, no appeal to tradition and precedent. They spoke most often of their own plans, and the trials of their own age and kind. The skills upon which the cliques prided themselves and from which they drew their nicknames were of other sorts. Not even farming occupied a large share of their conversation, keen as their rivalry often was when work was going on.

In Rynamona the most frequent centre for the gatherings of the young men was the house of Roche, 'the public prosecutor', whose eldest son, a keen farmer about thirty, was something of a leader

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among them. Most of the young men between twenty-five and thirty-five met there. Through the winter months they met nearly every night, and played the usual games of the countryside, 'nap' and 'forty-five', often far into the wee hours. Other groups through the community met like these men and followed like pursuits with an equal zest.

At times, a custom somewhat more organized, the 'gamble', unites them all. It often brings in other young men across the lines separating community from community. As often as once a week, a gamble is held in or near Rynamona. Each household in its turn throws open its doors to the card-players. Admission, usually a shilling, goes to defraying the expense of a supper and tea for all and goes toward the prize.

For the gamble is one of many sporting events. The prize may be a turkey, or two geese, even a young pig or calf. Elaborate conventions govern the play, and the winner may count himself a proud man. To be known in the countryside, far and wide, as a 'great gambler' is a coveted distinction proving shrewdness and skill. The country dance is another such event, and still enlivens the countryside in the winter months, bringing the younger members of the communities together and providing honour for the distinguished. For 'a great dancer' is as widely known. In summer, hurley, the national game, has the same effect; and nowadays, through the nation-wide organization of the Gaelic

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526 573 884 Athletic Association, the 'great hurler' may win his way to the admiration of all Ireland.

But at home, in the local community, the young 884 men remain what they are. Their distinction lifts 573 them not at all from their status. Their skills are nothing more than proficiencies. The pursuits of the subordinate generation are no more than 'good times' that 'pass the time'. For, through no plan or design, but merely through the force of the social organization of values and behaviours, the activities of the young men's cliques exert no larger role within the community.

For the young men's cliques do not primarily serve to knit the community as a whole the more firmly. The difference is structural. The activities of the young men unite them from farm to farm, from clique to clique, even from one community to the next. The integration of the young men is a looser and less inclusive integration than that the old men's clique performs, even though the numbers ephemerally joined in gamble, dance or hurley match are much greater.

888 573 For the old men's clique unites, in its controlling voice, both young and old. The old men's clique unites the old men in terms of their common individual positions as recipients of the respect of the community, and as heads, owners and commanders of their family corporations. It expresses for the community the same subordination of the young men that is their lot within their families.

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In such a case, the course of the countryman's path through rural life is plainly charted. In the normal event, the circle of his friends and contemporaries must change and progress. There comes a time when either he or they must break away altogether. Distinction in the world of the young men's pursuits is at best but a nine days' or nine years' wonder. He faces perforce a new orientation of sentiment and a new sort of behaviour. Just as he moves to a new social place at marriage, he must move onward among the cliques of his fellows in the community.

The case of John Quinn in Rynamona, the newcomer to the old men's house, can bear re-examination in this light. Quinn first belonged to a group which met at the house of one Joseph McMahon, better known as Oscair, the Hercules of Irish saga, for his great strength. Oscair was the centre of the group. He was a rural carpenter, with only a small plot of garden and his house. But he was a good workman, a good singer, a gay-hearted jokester, and something of a repository of folk-tale. He was between forty-five and fifty.

The men who collected round Oscair's fire were aged from thirty-five to sixty. Like their age, their habit was intermediate between old and young. Talk was the order of the day; they seldom played cards. Oscair's song and ballad enlivened the gathering.

Some of the men who came here spoke with

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573 554 'weight'; they tried to turn the talk into a discussion of the affairs of the community. Old Moroney, the 'strongest' farmer of Rynamona, who would not go to the old men's house, came here. John Quinn came. Before he began his entrance into the old men's house, which we have described, he spoke here with 'weight'. He gambled willingly enough, but he showed himself more and more impatient with the 'playboys' of young fellows. Another man, O'Sullivan, a herdsman of sixty-five and the local 'vet', also came. The rest were younger men, farmer's sons.

But this was a very unstable group. When finally John Quinn moved onward it fell to pieces, and Oscair's hearth was left untenanted each night.

For what shows itself here is a transitional state; the members of the group were in some way or another a little off the centres of their kind in Rynamona. For a moment were gathered here those who could move upward, like John Quinn. Gradually, they could attain full status, they could move into the social place which centres family headship, the land, a line of descent, and the old man's role within the community. Oscair's hearth for them was a roadside resting-place.

With these intermediates were gathered the representatives of another anomalous social place. Both Oscair and O'Sullivan 'the vet' were important figures in the community; their occupations and their skills won them respect and admiration

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over the countryside. At least, O'Sullivan, the older man, was free to come and go wherever he might wish. But both were 'landless' men; they could never attain full peasant status. In the identifications of Irish familism they were condemned to celibacy; neither could feel comfortable in the old men's *cuaird*. There was no place there for them, except as Oscair's behaviour showed, as 'playboys' and entertainers. So they, too, must occupy an interstice in the structural alignments of rural social life.

For once again the examination of rural life leads one perforce to concepts of structural balance. The organization of the community takes its form in the social behaviour of cliques among the country-people. That behaviour cannot be disassociated from the characteristic alignment of sentiment and interests which at once separates and reintegrates the generations. And the alignment itself in its turn relates the countrymen to one another in the community, upon the basis of relative age, with the familistic nexus in which are balanced prestige, command, the land and the continuities of descent. That to which the countryman is attached is a social order, as Sir Horace Plunkett alone among the commentators on the Irish scene could see. And a social order is an active living growth whose embrace soon gathers in the whole of life.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

624 partners to come to Inis Beag to confer with him, knowing that they were ill with
556 influenza, which resulted in a serious outbreak of the disease shortly afterward. A
[793] fire which broke out in a storage room next to the house of the king some months
[731] after the shipwreck was viewed by irate islanders as divine retribution for his "greed and selfishness."

624 In Ireland, the term "gombeen" is used to demean the usurious shopkeeper,
444 but this word is directed against the king only by those who most dislike him, and
275 then to connote what they consider a combination of piety and avarice in his behavior rather than his economic practices. His role as moral guardian, with frequent instruction and reprimand as to manners and misdemeanors to men in the pub and children visiting the shop, is deeply resented by many. He does not care to have women make purchases in the shop, where they can observe men drinking and be observed in turn, ostensibly on moral grounds; he urges that children do the marketing instead, not for the convenience of their mothers, it is said, but because he can overcharge and short-change them more easily. To dissuade women from shopping, he reads out their lists and talks with them about family affairs in a loud whisper, so that they have no privacy. The men complain not only of his alleged practice of overcharging and short-changing them late at night when the pub is overcrowded with "light headed" drinkers, but also of his criticizing their actions in public, his frequent closing of the pub before midnight, and his refusal to serve those whom he feels have "taken too much" or those about to attend a party where more drinks will be proffered them.

624 Supporters of Fine Gael and Labour, among others, object to the manner in
664 which the king curries the favor of Fianna Fail representatives and campaigns for
666 the party. He is accused of using illegal tactics, such as haranguing voters outside of the school as they enter to cast their ballots, in his endeavor to keep Fianna Fail
624 in power. A more serious charge related to this one is his opposition to change in
669 Inis Beag which might benefit the population as a whole, an opposition which
178 explains his support of political party and church—both conservative forces. It is asserted that, just as the government wants to preserve the Gaelic language and supposed Celtic virtues of the folk and the church their strength of belief and morality and thus underwrite the *status quo*, the senior publican wants no changes which might threaten his economic position and control over the lives of the islanders. To this end, he is thought to use his influence with priests and politicians who are in a position to modify local conditions.

184 Absent from Inis Beag is the evening *cuaird* of old men, which plays such
• 573 a decisive role in the political and social life of villages on the mainland. It is a
887 clique of visitors who usually convene at a particular home, called the "old men's house," to formulate local policies.

626 Much of the community's relation to the outer world is debated here and deter-
573 mined by the old men's agreement.... It is here that petitions for roads, for relief work in winter, for extension of agricultural prize schemes, and all of the "political" business of the county council and its committees originates on the side of the local community. It is here too that the community reaches its unanimity in party voting.... Here it is too that the community makes its appraisal of its own members and those with whom it is in contact. And that appraisal tells quite heavily in the behavior the community will adopt toward the person or

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> conditions appraised. . . . The community regulates its internal affairs through the *cuaird* as well. It is here public opinion is formulated. There is nothing formal about the decisions made upon the incidents arising from day to day. The local community has no implement with which to enforce its will. But it has the power of gossip and . . . boycott (Arensberg and Kimball 1940:190–191).

Decisions of this sort and their sanctions in Inis Beag rest largely in the hands of government officials and the priest, headmaster, and king.

Many folk long have believed that the island needs a council with representatives from each of the four villages serving on it, to foster cooperation and to formulate policies which bear on the welfare of all. After independence in 1922, a move was made to form such a council, but the civil war interrupted the process; since that time, according to the islanders, the opposition of curates and king, none of whom have wanted their vested interests threatened, has succeeded in blocking the formation of such a body. Other forces at work, however, are the lassitude and ambivalence toward authority of the people, and their dislike and jealousy of one another. They complain of the lack of leadership, or of the "wrong" kind of leadership, as in the case of the priest and king; but they are unable or unwilling to expend the energy needed to get themselves organized and "pull together" for the common good. Often those who advocate the formation of a council will, in the next breath, express their dislike or distrust of its potential members, or a desire to remain independent of its collective will should it run contrary to their own. A vacationing emigrant who said, "We have no sense of civic pride and responsibility but think only of ourselves.", assessed the situation accurately.

Among the traits attributed to Inis Beag folk by nativists and primitivists are self-reliance, independence, and individualism. But the self-reliance of the islanders has become undermined increasingly since 1891 by a benevolent government; their independence is severely curtailed by restrictions imposed on them by curate, headmaster, king, and their fellows; and their individualism is a figment of literary imagination disguising a strict conformism. Inis Beag as much as any community is characterized by gossip, ridicule, and opprobrium, which gain their effectiveness as social control mechanisms from the deep concern of the folk with "saving face," and which serve to limit freedom of action and behavioral idiosyncracy. When asked to rank the major deficiencies of island life, the people almost without exception place the prevalence of malicious gossiping, along with poverty and the intrusion of the clergy into secular affairs, at the head of their list.

No matter how much the islanders detest gossiping when they are its victims, they nevertheless welcome every opportunity to engage in it. News of an event passes quickly by word of mouth from Low to Terrace Villages, and variations in the description of the event are usually numerous due to the distortions of rumor. In order to circumvent gossip, parties are organized at the last moment and invitations issued by small boys moving quietly from door to door in the night; persons will leave the island—sometimes to emigrate, visit the hospital with a serious illness, or enter an order—without previous announcement, running from their homes to the strand to board the last canoes for the steamer; and mail is posted just prior to the arrival of the steamer and picked up immediately after it

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538 539 or Sean O'Sullivan's recent *Folktales of Ireland*. But a further word must be said of the tales recited by the *seanchai*. Popular among local legends are those dealing with such topics as the famine, evictions and other excesses of past landlords, visits to the island by the Black and Tans seeking political refugees, shipwrecks, and tragedies at sea among fishermen. Stories of the supernatural center around the actions of fairies, the pookah and banshee, those with the evil eye, phantom ships, mermaids and sea demons, and material objects possessing human attributes and 538 volitions. These local legends sometimes qualify as anecdotes, and it is humorous 522 anecdotes which the folk refer to as jokes. Outsiders—such as returned Yanks— [177] are responsible for introducing true jokes, but often these are not told and soon are forgotten, especially if they are "dirty jokes." There is no indigenous dirty joking tradition because of sexual puritanism. I have heard men use various verbal devices—innuendos, puns, and asides—that they believed bear sexual connotations; [123] relatively speaking, they are pallid. In the song that I composed, one line of a [832] verse refers to an islander who arose late on the morning of the shipwreck after "dreaming perhaps of a beautiful mate;" this is regarded as a highly suggestive phrase, and I have seen it redden cheeks and lower glances in a pub.

538 [221] [178] [574] [561] [562] Storytelling in the past took place mostly between the last week of October and early January, when inclement weather forced a slackening of the fishing regime, and the Christmas season kept people in and near their homes. Nowadays, card playing almost nightly during November and part of December by many of the men has become a substitute activity, which excludes the participation of women and children who once composed a part of the audience addressed by the storyteller. At any one time during this period, several groups met to hear Inis 538 Beag narrators; a *scealai* or *seanchai* might be visited by a group and serve as host, • 573 or he might be invited into or visit on his own another household, and word of his presence would quickly draw an audience. The session lasted from eight or nine o'clock until midnight, and a tale might be so long that its telling occupied an entire evening, or even two or three consecutive nights. After completing a brief narrative, the storyteller might call on a colleague in the audience to recite a sequel, or the hearers might request that he continue or urge another to contribute a tale.

[857] [562] The average sized audience was composed of a dozen persons, although as many as 20 might attend a session. Small children seldom were allowed in the room unless they were members of the family of the host, nor were women of another household; the children were admonished to sit quietly and not to talk or whisper, and the women knitted or crocheted while listening. Seated in a semi-circle around the hearth, the hearers were faced by the narrator who was seated [574] on the right side of the fireplace, and the wife of the host on the left. Refreshments never were served, but a clay pipe was passed around among the men and very old women. The host furnished pipe and tobacco, and the pipe was passed back to him by each person in turn after being puffed on for several minutes. Only if the story was a long one was the pipe proffered by the host to the narrator from time to time.

538 561 [868] Most storytellers were men past the age of 60 years, but some were between 40 and 60 and a few even younger. An old narrator of reputation often called on a young man to recite in order to give him practice, if he felt that the

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parties, so that many islanders will not give them for fear of possible damage to houses and outbuildings. The reason why one man is assigned to the barrel of stout and a "firm" master of ceremonies is favored is to curb drunkenness and factional fighting. Small parties are coming to replace the large ones of the past, with invitations tendered secretly and at the last moment to avoid attracting "hooligans." The format, however, has remained the same.

Pubs

Both pubs in Inis Beag do a thriving business. There are some folk who purchase all of their provisions, drinks, and tobacco in only one of the pubs, others who buy most of them in one but occasionally do business in the second, and still others who scrupulously balance their buying between the two. The first group is composed of near kin of the publicans, and the second of those who are economically beholden to the king and utilize his pub mostly, or who dislike him and give the lion's share of their business to the other. This pattern is broken only when one of the pubs is out of a commodity which the other has in stock, one of them is closed for whatever reason, a "big night" is taking place at one of them, or a dispute interferes. During the day, provisions are purchased in the shop—by children, women, and sometimes men; the women and children make their visits as brief as possible, but the men are likely to stay for at least one "pint" of stout and a "smoke." Other visitors in the daytime are chronic drinkers, men who are working nearby and use the pub for a break, and men reciprocating for economic services rendered. The pub is the province of the adult males at night, and the only women who enter are the teachers, visiting emigrants, and tourists. Seldom is step dancing done unless outsiders are present, and when women are in the audience they will be called out to form a set or to dance solo or be paired with an islander. Some nights only two or three of the folk will put in an appearance at the pub, but on other nights as many as 20 persons will crowd into the narrow room, while others in the hallway and outside wait to take their turn inside. Another half-dozen men may sit in the snug drinking and talking together privately.

Men come to the pub after dark usually in groups of two, three, or four. Reciprocity dictates the drinking procedure, with each man in a group taking his turn at "standing a round" for as long as the evening lasts. Men who do not like to drink much or have little money will come to the pub singly or with another in like circumstances, so that they will not become victims of the custom of reciprocation. My first experience with this custom—in 1958 in a neighboring island—almost ended in tragedy for me, as I was with six men who insisted on drinking "glasses" of whiskey; only my deep commitment to research and a heavy meal a short time before prevented a "third round knockout." The first hour after the men arrive in the pub is a quiet one, as they sit in silence or whisper to one another while drinking pints in rapid succession. As their shyness gradually is overcome by alcohol, they become more talkative and speak in louder tones to a wider circle of their fellows. At least two hours must pass before individuals have "courage" enough to tell stories to all assembled or to sing. The best singers will be